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CORTEZ

THE CONQUEROR.

A TRAGEDY

IN FIVE ACTS,

[FOUNDED ON THE CONQUEST OF MEXICO,]

BY LEWIS F. THOMAS,

Author of "Inda and other Poems."

WASHINGTON, D. C.,
PUBLISHED BY B. W. FERGUSON,
No. 486 SEVENTH STREET.
.....
1857.

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DEDICATION.

TO

GEN. JOHN A. QUITMAN,

OF MISSISSIPPI.

MY DEAR SIR:

During the late war between our country and Mexico, Fame loudly echoed your name as one of the most gallant among your compatriots in arms. An intimate acquaintance with some of your officers, afforded to me ample testimony that your high chivalry in the conflict was only surpassed by your humanity and urbanity when the conflict was over. In your present capacity as a representative in Congress, I have had frequent occasion to note your integrity as a man, and your sagacity, ability, and patriotism as a statesman. My personal acquaintance with you leads me to admire the unaffected gentleman and unobtrusive scholar. As a slight token of my high consideration and regard I respectfully inscribe to you this Tragedy, *Cortez the Conqueror*, founded on events of old occurrence on the same fields where you so lately and so largely contributed to render the name of our country and your own, illustrious.

Very truly, your friend

and obedient servant,

THE AUTHOR.

JANUARY, 1857.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Theatrical managers or actors desiring to perform this tragedy can address their proposals to the author at Washington, D. C. The two first acts of "Cortez the Conqueror" were submitted to the great tragedian, the late J. B. Booth, from whom they received the highest encomiums, and who intended to produce the tragedy, had he lived. The *whole* has been perused by his son, Mr. Edwin Booth, (on whom the mantle of his father has fallen,) and who concurs in the high opinions expressed by his parent and prototype. It has also been eulogized by other distinguished authorities in the histrionic art, and by gentlemen of high literary ability and critical taste. "Cortez," &c., has also been prepared as a Dramatic Equestrian Spectacle.

PREFACE.

The history of the conquest of Mexico, by the Spaniards, affords ample material for more than a score of tragedies, and has exercised the pens of more than a dozen historians. In working up the subject for my tragedy, I have kept in view many of the most remarkable and prominent events, as detailed by Clavigero, Bernal Diaz, (one of the conquerors,) and Prescott. I have endeavored to delineate my historical characters after the portraitures of those writers, and to speak for each of my *dramatis personæ*, in the style and language which might naturally be supposed to pertain to the character, circumstances and condition of each, whether real or imaginary. How far I have succeeded in these particulars, and in the work generally, are matters for the judgment of critics. Of course, from the circumscribed limits of my work, very many incidents of most startling effect, scenes of cruelty and horror, of chivalry and romance, and of self-devoting heroism, have necessarily been omitted altogether; and some that could not be given in detail, are barely alluded to. I have, however, pursued the general outline of the conquest in its chronological order, with but few anachronisms and poetic licences, so that, I think, the reader, or an audience, can readily follow the histrionic characters with a tolerable idea of the idiosyncrasy of each, and a fair understanding of the events in which all really participated, or are supposed to have acted. The character of Cortez, and the incidents in which he is made to figure, are almost entirely drawn from history. He set out from Havana in the year 1519, with 11 vessels and 619 men and 13 horses, on his expedition against Mexico. He was then 33 years of age. When quite a youth, he had an amour with a lady who was confined in a convent in Salamanca, and in leaping the convent wall, he broke his leg. The accident delayed his departure for the New World for about a year. From this incident, it was

easy for the imagination to connect him with Maria de Estrada and the page, her son, (the first a real, and the latter an imaginary character,) as I have done in the lower plot of the play. Marina, the first Christian convert on this continent, relates her own history to Cortez, precisely as it occurred. She was interpreter to Cortez, his faithful friend and constant companion, and saved him and his troops in the manner related in the text, and on several other occasions. As to Montezuma, his imprisonment and manner of his death are entirely historical. The rise of the waters, the appearance of a comet, the eclipse of the sun, the prophesies of his sister, all which he alludes to in one of his speeches, are occurrences that actually took place about the time of the appearance of the Spaniards, and were believed by the Mexicans to be the certain prognostics of their downfall. The circumstance attending a sacrifice and the burning of the temple, as related by the High Priest, occurred at the same period, and were likewise deemed ominous of ruin. Hassan was the name of a Moor, a slave to Cortez, who accompanied him in his expedition. Mexicatzin, the Tlascalan chief, was one of his first allies. Olid, Lugo, Sandoval and Alvarado were all young men, captains and companions of Cortez—adventurers, such as those now with Walker in Central America. Olmedo was a priest and chaplain of the expedition, and gave timely warning to Cortez of the design of Velasquez to arrest it in the manner stated. Thus the characters and the leading incidents pertaining to the conquest, which form the *upper* plot of the tragedy, are all real and historical. Some of the situations and the language of the speakers only, are imaginary. In the *under* plot I have drawn entirely on my imagination.

Some persons may at first be disposed, hypercritically, to cavil at the seeming incongruities of the opening soliloquies of Olid, in contemplation of suicide, but, I think, on reflection they will be willing to admit that no man (or no madman or fool even) ever came to the determination of becoming *felo de se*, without having "justified the deed unto himself," by most incongruous arguments. I have ante-dated the treason and death of Olid, and have given him a more honorable end than he really met; for he was, in fact, beheaded at Honduras for leading a revolt against the authority of Cortez, in favor of the adherents of Velasquez. I have also, in the under plot, assigned, besides ambition, another possible cause for his treason, or incentive to it; but in so doing, I have done no violence to his true character, or to that of any other connected with him in the tragedy. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the vicious characters of most of the conquerors; for there are but few crimes in the catalogue of human infamy of which they were not guilty. It would be equally difficult to extol their endurance, fortitude and heroism. Their characters and their exploits are anomalous; they and their deeds are without parallels in history.

When I wrote a portion of the following pages, I had not the slightest design of perpetrating a tragedy. The first part composed, was the first soliloquy of Olid; which was written in my boyhood, and entitled "A Suicide's reflections on Death." The next was Maria's speech to Olmedo, which was occasioned about the same period, by my hearing a lewd woman abuse a priest. In after years I read the History of Mexico, while convalescing from sickness; and during the time, in looking over some scraps of manuscript, I came across the soliloquy, and formed the idea of attempting a tragedy: but I had no definite plot. My first conception was to produce something on the conquest of Texas. On the return of health I threw aside the little I had written. Being however, through a series of years, from time to time, an invalid, I was, when so, in the habit of resorting to books and my pen to relieve the tedium of a sick chamber; and on such occasions "Cortez the Conqueror" has been mostly produced. After the *first* act was written, I lost, while travelling, my trunk containing it, and did not recover it for four or five years. On re-perusing my recovered manuscript, the old idea of tragedy writing occurred to me, and I wrote the *last* scene of the *last act*, and also produced the *second act*, while in sickness, at a very few sittings; but on the restoration of health my work was again laid aside. Some seven years ago, something occurred which induced me to show what I had written (two acts) to the great tragedian, Mr. Booth, (then living;) and the high encomiums bestowed upon my commencement, by him, and by other friends whose opinions I valued, induced me to resume my work, whenever

indisposition confined me to my chamber; an occurrence sufficiently frequent and long, to enable me to present my production in its present shape. It has beguiled some hours of illness, which but for it, would have been dreary indeed to me; and if the reading or representation of it should serve to amuse or instruct others, I shall feel well assured that it has *not* been "writ in vain."

THE AUTHOR.

PROLOGUE.

BY "MUDIE BRAIG."

[illegible] ever prone to roam,
Neglect the stores of mental wealth at home;
Too long, by narrow critics lashed to awe,
Our people [illegible] law;
Taken, like wild [illegible] by the brand,
And dragged [illegible] the subject grand.
Ah! mid the [illegible] and the age,
Is that of [illegible] learned page,
Which [illegible] present with its impulse free,
And [illegible] antiquity!
For [illegible] is the eye view to-day—
A native author hears a native play;
The [illegible] through untrodden bowers,
He comes [illegible] freshest flowers.
He tells [illegible] glorious time,
When [illegible] to deeds sublime—
When [illegible] beneath the new,
And [illegible] fewer.
And [illegible] breath again.
Whose [illegible] than men.
If aught [illegible] his page is shown,
Be proud, America! 'tis all thine own!
And now, [illegible] your prologue bids adieu,
[illegible] to candor and to you.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SPANIARDS.

FERNANDO CORTEZ, *called by the Mexicans,* MA-LA-CHE.

CHRISTOVAL DE OLID,
PEDRO DE ALVARADO,
FRANCISCO DE LUGO,
GONZALEZ DE SANDOVAL — *His Captains.*

ANTONIO DE OJEDA, *Page to* Cortez.*

BARTHOLOMEW DE OLMEDO, *Priest and Chaplain.*

HASSAN, *a* Moor, *Slave to* Cortez.

JUAN DE ESTRADA, *a Soldier.**

MARIA DE ESTRADA, *his Wife.*

Soldiers, &c., &c.

MEXICANS.

MONTEZUMA, *Emperor.*

HIGH PRIEST.

LORD TEUTILE, *an Ambassador.*

Two Gladiators.

Messengers, &c., &c.

NINNAH, *daughter to* Montezuma.

Females attending on Ninnah.

MEXICATZIN, *Chief of the Tlascalans, and ally of* Cortez.

MARINA, *Slave to* Cortez, *his Interpreter, and the first Christian Convert on the American Continent.*

The characters marked thus (*) are imaginary—all the others are historical.

All the SCENES of the First Act are in and about HAVANA—the rest are at VERA CRUZ, on the road to, and in the city of MEXICO.

It is expected that many lines, especially in the first act, will be omitted in the representation. That is, however, a matter of taste or expediency, with manager or actor. For costume, scenery, paraphernalia, &c., see end of the volume.

CORTEZ, THE CONQUEROR.

ACT I.—SCENE FIRST.

SCENE.—*A Room in the House of* ESTRADA, *in the suburbs of Havana.*—ESTRADA *and his Wife,* MARIA.

Maria. I tell thee now, Juan de Astrada,
If thou art backward in this enterprize,
Thou'rt no true Spaniard, and I never more
Will call thee husband. Out upon thee, man,
Thou hast a better chance of service here
Than ever to thy father's lot befell
When he was squire to Medina Celi,
And followed him against the barbarous Moors;
Yet he gained honor! and here hast thou now
Offers of honor and great wealth to boot
In gallant Cortez's service; and forsooth,
Thy laggard spirit bids thee stay at home,
When thou should'st gird thy armor for the wars.
Why, e'en Ojeda, that unbearded youth,
Whose fragile arm can scarce a buckler bear,
Is eager to be rank'd in Cortez's band.

Estrada. Well, dame Maria, I have seen so much
Of war among these heathen Indians,
That I am weary of it; and I long
To live in peace. The golden promises
This General gives, will never be repaid,
Save with requirements of hardest toil,
And evil usage for good service done.

Maria. And dost thou doubt the noble Cortez's word?
And th[illegible] call war's service toil,
Which is but pastime to a gallant man?

Estrada. I doubt not Cortez, but I doubt this scheme,
And doubt the right to slay men for their gold.
In my life's morning, the array of war
To me was a most pleasing pageantry,
And 'twas my sport to rush into the strife,
And never question if the cause were just,
So it were sanctioned by my king's command;
And then I deem'd a victory cheaply won,
However dear the carnage that it cost.
But now, the noontime of my day has come,
And, like the weary reaper, I would fain
Pass my meridian in shady rest,
And con the profits of my harvest o'er;
And when life's eventide is closing in,
I would look back, upon some hours at least,
That mark'd my day not all in evil spent,
And show'd I sometimes had remember'd Heaven.

Maria. Some priest has [illegible] that soul of thine!
Frighted thy fancy with a tale of Hell;
Subdued thy spirit to his purposes,
By o'ermuch penance and anathemas
Unmann'd thee, and made a dotard of thee.

Estrada. I wish to quit this butcher trade of war,
And live in quiet in a rural home.

Maria. Wouldst thou become a slave to till the soil?
Wouldst thou thy soldier-'prenticeship disgrace?
And change the honorable field of arms
For servile tasks in fields of husbandry,
Beshrew me! but, methinks a shepherd's crook,
Would more befit thee than a warrior's lance—
A sickle better suit thee than a sword.
I took thee for a soldier, brave and true;
My father's daughter ne'er had wed thee else.
Here comes Antonio, thy foster-son;
His daring courage and his manly port
Do put thy older soldiership to shame.

[*Enter Antonio de Ojeda.*

Welcome, Antonio; how hast thou sped?
How came thy errand on?

Antonio. O, excellent!

From conference with Cortez straight I've come,
And, my kind foster-parents, give me joy!
He doth accept my service as his page.

Maria. Indeed! Forsooth, thy tidings are most glad.
What means hast thou wherewith to back thy suit?

Antonio. None, save a simple story simply told,
Truth needs no aid in telling, for it speaks
With native eloquence that moves men's hearts,
When all the arts of oratory fail.

Maria. How didst thou gain admittance to the chief,
Unfriended and alone?

Antonio. I had a friend.
When I went hence I met the General's slave,
Hassan, the Moor, to whom I told my wish,
And soon he gave me conduct to the chief,
Who sat alone, poring o'er maps and charts
And inky parchments; which his flashing eyes
Seem'd to light up as he bent o'er to read.

Maria. Well, tell us now what pass'd 'twixt him and thee?

Antonio. He scann'd me with quick glances for a while,
Then ask'd my errand, and I told him thus:
"May't please you, sir, I am an orphan youth;
Antonio de Ojeda is my name;
But of my parentage I nothing know,
Though nothing of a parent's care have lack'd;
For, since the youngest date my mem'ry keeps,
I have received all kindness and all care
From Juan de Estrada and his wife.
Hither, from Salamanca, in their charge
I came; and now, at her behest, I seek
What may it please thee graciously to grant:
Befitting service, near unto thyself,
And an appointment for me in the wars."
The while I spoke, his eyes were fixed on mine
With a most startling gaze.

Maria. Said he nothing?

Antonio. No, not at first; but from his seat he rose,
And paced the chamber hurriedly; and then
Came where I stood, and gazed me in the face,
And dash'd his hand across his brow, and sigh'd,
And turn'd again, and strode heavily;
Circling the chamber round, till where I stood
Again he came, and then he took my hand,

And said I was a noble, gallant youth;
And he smiled on me with a smile so sweet,
So very sweet! O, it did make me wish
He were my father, to smile on me so.

Maria. What said he next?

Antonio. Why as he prest'd my hand,
He said, he in his service had no page,
And he bethought him that he needed one.
And I should serve him. Then he dropt my hand,
And threw himself into his seat again,
And closed his eyes, and bade me go away,
Equip myself, and come to him anon,
And thus dismissed me without further speech.

Maria, (*aside.*) So Cortez has some feeling, after all.

Antonio. Methinks the cares of his great enterprize
Weigh heavy on him.

Maria. Ay, no doubt they do.

Antonio. What ails thee, foster-father? thou art dull;
Is thy health failing?

Estrada. Nay, I'm well enough;
My dame and I were just now in debate
Touching this scheme against the Mexicans;
For which, in sooth, I have but little heart,
Yet, since thou hast the Gen'ral's favor won,
I will prepare me for his service, too,
With what alacrity my spirit can,
To follow him where'er his fortune leads.

Antonio. Then let us quick get all in readiness;
Thou art a vet'ran soldier, and I'll need
Thy aid and counsel to prepare myself
For the new station I am soon to fill,
And my kind mother, thou wilt aid me too;
The city I will visit, for a while,
For some appointments, and soon meet you here.

Maria. Dispatch thy errand with what haste thou canst.

Antonio. I will be back right speedily. Adieu!

[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE SECOND.

Time—Near Midnight.

SCENE—*A Study.—Books, Busts, Maps, &c.*—OLID (solus) *dressed in the black habit of a student, with student's cap, and seated at a table, on which is a burning lamp, a Bible and a crucifix, a death's head and cross bones.—A clock of antique shape against the wall, with the index near the hour of twelve.*—OLID *holds a phial in his hand, and seems reading in the book, as curtain rises.*

Olid. Yes, yes, 'tis destiny that wills it so.
This holy book; nor this all holy sign,
Nor the wise heathen's[1] teachings of sad doubt,
No, nor the fear he fear'd, can stay my hand.
Why should I pause at short'ning my sad days,
Since life is a protracted death-struggle,
Where mortal courage in the end must fail?
And death is but a quiet, dreamless sleep,
That knows no waking. [*Rises.*] Death, I'll drink
to thee.
This, [*holding up the phial.*] thy nepenthe for life's
teeming [ills.
This potent poison, soon shall give me peace.
[*Moves front.*
O! now, I do renounce thee, and thy train
Of wrongs, oppressions, cruelties and woes,
O, world! thou Hydra still insatiate,
That hath a myriad vile tongues to curse,
As many venom'd fangs to gnaw and wound,
And Argus eyes, with multiplying sight
That magnify slight errors into crimes;
And but one heart to harbor kindliness,
And that, alas! too often thou giv'st up
To burning hate and uncontroll'd revenge.
Society! I loathe thee, and the fools,
And fawning knaves, and cringing sycophants,
And heartless flatterers who gaily flit
On painted pinions, through the giddy throng
Of which thou art the being, aim and end.

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